

Wisconsin's Turning Point:

Taking Action to Transform the Public's Health

*Protecting and Promoting the Health for All
Wisconsin Citizens and their Communities*



An Initiative to Transform Wisconsin's Public Health System to
Address Current and Emerging 21st Century Health Problems and Issues

Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

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Executive Summary

What is Turning Point and what will it accomplish?

The goal of Wisconsin's Turning Point is to create a healthier Wisconsin. Turning Point is designed to modernize and revitalize the public health system to address current and emerging 21st century health problems, concerns, and related environmental issues.

This transformation will improve the public health system by pulling together resources, developing a shared vision and common goals between government, its people and its institutions. Through this transformation we will obtain fresh, creative ideas and useful information to benefit the health for all. This transformation will be done efficiently and effectively using data, science, partnerships, and common sense.

Wisconsin's Turning Point will provide opportunities for our citizens and our partners to participate in the transformation of public health. Through Turning Point we will generate important products that include:

- A definition of public health to include what it is, what it does, what we want it to be, and how it should be structured;
- Identification of Wisconsin's top public health priorities and the resources and strategies necessary to protect all, especially our most vulnerable citizens;
- A Public Health Improvement Plan for 2010, as required by state statute;
- Policy changes to support a sustainable transformation for the future; and
- Action steps that consider resources, partnerships, information and technology, and development of the public health workforce.

Why is Turning Point needed in Wisconsin?

Wisconsin's public health system has a broad societal charge and legislative mandate to promote health and prevent disease for all citizens. Public health's focus is the entire population. In exercising its leadership responsibility, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services has identified public health as a priority in its Strategic Business Plan. This is in keeping with the Wisconsin State Legislature's requirement that the Department publish a plan to protect the public's health every ten years.

Executive Summary

The responsibility of public health is to fulfill society's interest in assuring conditions in which the population can be healthy. Its substance includes organized community efforts aimed at the prevention of disease and the promotion of health. It links many disciplines and sectors, and rests on a foundation of science and epidemiology. This includes activities undertaken by government and the associated efforts of other public, private, and voluntary sectors.

Wisconsin's public health system reaches all citizens and the sectors in which our citizens grow, live, work, and play. This includes health care, commerce, agriculture, education, natural resources, environmental health, business, faith community, workforce development and many others. Wisconsin's public health system is the collective efforts of all these sectors in service to our citizens.

Wisconsin's public health system is at an opportune point, given the sweeping changes in how government conducts its business. It has never been more important for public health to take effective action for the future. In recent years, many governmental sectors have undergone major organizational and system changes in order to better respond to the needs of our citizens. None have been more notable than the sweeping policy changes led by Governor Tommy G. Thompson and the State of Wisconsin in welfare reform and managed care.

As other systems have changed, so must public health. The changes needed in Wisconsin's public health system is known as: *"Turning Point: Taking Action to Transform the Public's Health."* Previous government reform efforts have focused on smaller, more well defined population groups and programs. Turning Point will develop strategies and action-based solutions which will reach out and effectively serve all Wisconsin citizens.

Throughout this transformation our underlying principles must remain steady, but public health practices and methods will need to change to stimulate progress for the future. The status quo of public health must change if we are to protect and promote the health of the entire population.

Description of Existing Barriers / DEFINING THE PROBLEM

There is no one commonly accepted definition of “public health.” Many of our state and community leaders do not entirely understand what public health means and how the communities they lead benefit from it. Some may see it as a nebulous concept, while others may have outmoded perceptions of public health. This circumstance is not unique to Wisconsin. We have not effectively translated the meaning and importance of public health into the hearts and minds of our citizens. Community perceptions associate public health with its traditions in communicable disease prevention and control, environmental health, and home visits to the poor. Our communities and their leaders are perplexed when public health attempts to provide leadership to facilitate chronic disease prevention efforts, violence and injury prevention, or build integrated partnerships with the private and public sectors.

Other problems include:

- categorical funding streams that are often not linked to community priorities;
- absence of a process for defining and implementing public health priorities;
- resources which are not directed to building/sustaining infrastructures to support core functions and essential services;
- a workforce that needs retraining to address current and emerging societal issues;
- inadequate and fragmented data management and information systems; and
- separate organizational and institutional cultures of public health, medicine, and environmental health.

As a result, public health has had to compete with more powerful voices in a cost-containing environment. We have not identified shared interests, policy linkages, and incentives to work together as partners for the public's interest.

ELEMENTS OF TURNING POINT

(See page 6 for illustration of Turning Point elements.)

Products & Timeline*(revised 11/99)*

1. Define public health and make recommendations regarding the future of public health in Wisconsin to include what it is, what it does, and what we want it to be.
 - Complete by February 2000
2. Determine Wisconsin's top priorities concerning the health of the public and general strategies to address the priorities.
 - Complete by March 2000
3. Publish a Public Health Improvement Plan for the Year 2010. This action plan will identify our top priorities and include the definition of public health and its basic structure.
 - Complete by July 2000
4. Develop a comprehensive Implementation Action Plan that will identify specific actions needed to implement changes regarding the following: (a) partnerships; (b) data, information, and technology; (c) education and training; (d) finance and funding; and (e) vulnerable populations. The Implementation Plan will also describe actions regarding (1) the definition of public health and its basic structure, and (2) the top public health priorities.
 - Complete by December 2000

Implementation will include:

- Developing recommendations for future biennial budget requests concerning policy, statute, and rule changes that would be needed.
- Incorporating recommendations from the Turning Point process into the DHFS Strategic Business Plan.
- Applying new knowledge learned to the Department's proposed administrative rules concerning certification of local health departments.
- Clarifying legal authorities in state statutes and rules.
- Ensuring that actions are taken to implement recommended changes to the public health system.

Structures

- Citizens and traditional and nontraditional partners will be included and engaged in Turning Point.
- Regional Community Review Teams (i) will be established to increase communities' impact on suggested changes to the public health system.
- The Transformation Team (ii) of representatives from diverse sectors will make recommendations to the Department of Health and Family Services.
- A State Reactor Panel (iii) will provide a mechanism by which key state policy leaders can have input into the recommendations of Turning Point.

Partnerships

- Inclusiveness is the guiding principle.
- Secure new, nontraditional partners such as the business community, faith community, health care payors, and representatives from vulnerable population groups, academia, and state and local policy leaders.
- Involvement of policy leaders, elected officials and other departments is vital.
- Involvement of local public health departments and boards of health is crucial.
- The Department and collaborating partners have demonstrated great support for Turning Point through significant in-kind contributions.

Methods

- Hold town meetings to provide public input.
- Utilize available assessments and information to form decisions.
- Use common sense and harness the knowledge and experience that people already possess.
- Take action as soon as possible and evaluate what works.
- Further financial resources for Turning Point will be requested through a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation proposal.

Wisconsin's Turning Point

